

Chapter 1 *Dino*

20 April was Dino Bracco's twenty-first birthday. He worked. Giovanni, his boss at the Hotel Grand, brought him a cake from the hotel kitchen. 'Just twenty-one!' said Giovanni, and he put his hand on Dino's back. 'Ah, Dino, Dino . . . when I was twenty-one . . . !'

Dino ate some cake and smiled. He was only twenty-one years old, but he was a young man who knew what he wanted. He had a plan.

'You must know what you want, Dino,' his mother said to him when he was a child. And he did. He had a plan. Dino came from a very small town called Roccella, in the south of Italy. His mother and father were farmers. Roccella was beautiful but no-one had any money. Dino was born there, but now he lived and worked in Venice. He worked at the reception of the Hotel Grand.



‘Wow!’ said Dino’s friends in Roccella. ‘You’re at a big hotel on the Venice Lido. How did you get that job?’

Dino smiled. ‘Because I work hard,’ he thought, ‘and I have a plan.’

Dino liked his work at the reception. When guests came in, he said hello to them and he asked, ‘Sir, madam, would you like a glass of Soave, one of Venice’s famous wines?’ He took their credit cards. When they weren’t from Italy, he took their passports. Then he asked the boy to take their bags to their room. He helped the guests. ‘Yes, madam, of course, madam.’ Dino’s boss, Giovanni Tardelli, thought he was a good boy.

He knew a girl at the hotel who also came from Roccella. Her name was Maria Luca and she worked as a waitress. Maria was nice and he liked to talk to her, but she was just a friend. On his birthday, she gave him a small picture of Roccella, their town.

‘I did it,’ she smiled at him. ‘You can look at the picture and think about home.’

‘Thank you, Maria!’ Dino smiled and put the picture in his little room. The picture was nice, but he didn’t think about Roccella much. He liked to think about his plans.

Women liked Dino. Well, why not? He was good-looking, with dark curly hair and beautiful brown eyes. And he was nice. The women who came to the hotel liked to talk to him. Dino was kind to them. But women were not in Dino’s plans. Not for the moment. ‘When I’m twenty-six,’ he thought, ‘I’m going to meet a woman, the woman I want to marry.’

Dino knew that it was important to look good. It was his job. He always wore good clothes: beautiful shirts, nice

jackets and trousers. His hair always looked good and he was always *elegante*. He knew that Italy was famous for nice clothes and beautiful things. That's why people came to Italy, to Venice.

Dino worked very long hours and he didn't make much money. His room at the back of the hotel was very small. It just had a small bed, a table and light, and somewhere for his clothes.

But Dino didn't think about the long hours, the little money and the small room. He liked his job at the Hotel Grand. And it was only the start. He knew what he wanted. Every night he wrote about the day in his little black book. Then he looked at his plans. He liked to read them every day.



The night of 20 April, his twenty-first birthday, Dino sat in his little room and looked at his little black book. He looked at his plans. 'Everything is good,' he thought. But on 21 April, something changed his plans. The woman with the long dark hair came and stayed at the Hotel Grand, and everything changed.